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ABSTRACT

Despite some exceptions in recent years, most elementary foreign language texts continue to be organized in a typical "twenty-five lesson" format bound by an old-fashioned idea of continuity. It is argued that this format is a major source of student frustration and a barrier to optimum second language acquisition. As one possible alternative, an organization into a larger number of minimal increment units is proposed. These small increments would allow for greater refinements in sequencing, early maximizing of student communication potential, and easier assimilation of basic structural features with less interference from exceptions and peripheral complications. The implied perspective and curricular framework is foreign language instruction at the college level, but much of what is said may also apply to instruction in the schools. (Authors)

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WANTED: ALTERNATIVES TO THE LESSON FORMAT IN ELEMENTARY FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

By Beth Carney and Francis Lide

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The organization and format of an elementary foreign language textbook is an extremely important factor in determining the ease and comfort with which the student makes his way through the vast maze of the unfamiliar tongue. The foreword of one French text divided into traditional lessons ends by extolling what the book can do "in the hands of an able and dedicated teacher."[1] This assertion could apply to most texts if we add able to adjust, rearrange, supplement, edit, rewrite, and dedicated to the thankless and time-consuming task.

The fact is that most teachers teach the book as written, with only minimal departures. Teacher inertia, inexperience, and, on the college level, the departmental constraints of pacing, course coordination, and multisection examinations all combine to produce this effect. For the student, the result is too often frustration and discomfort, which culminate, as the year progresses, in simple strain--and strain is rarely compatible with pleasure. He is straining to keep his head above the confused water of rules and their exceptions, active vocabulary imperfectly learned through distraction from excessive intrusion of passive vocabulary imposed by the story line. And alongside the strain and frustration, incidentally, there is disdain for and boredom with Paul the American and Suzanne the French friend--the inevitable two without whose continuing adventures the authors must feel the language would not stand up. For conscientious teachers, textbook selection has been a matter of discovering the one among myriad (it's an incredibly prolific field) which will require the least redoing. Teachers are weary of unraveling textbook material for more orderly and clear presentation.

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An elementary textbook written in lessons organizes into a limited number of large segments the between one hundred and two hundred individual points of grammar and idiom to be taught.[2]

These blocks may be called lessons, units, or chapters, but we shall call them lessons for our purposes. The number of lessons may vary from as few as thirteen to as many as thirty. In the upper part of this range, the number is thought of as corresponding roughly to the weeks of the academic year, and the preface frequently describes exactly how best to divide the book for pacing purposes on either a semester or a quarter system.

The combination of individual points of grammar into lessons can be of two sorts. Two or more completely unrelated points can be treated together, such as the German irregular weak verbs and the future and future perfect tenses; or a lesson may be devoted to a large block of systematically related grammar which, from a pedagogical point of view, consists in fact of many individual points (e.g., the perfect tenses of German verbs, or the French subjunctive).

Each lesson is structured according to a set sequence of distinct components. An older pattern, but one still frequently encountered, could be outlined as follows:

Presentation
Explanation (all new grammar)
Drills (on each point separately)
Exercises (mixing points)
Vocabulary for lesson

There are usually other incidental components, but these are the essential ones. Typically, the presentation consists of a single dialogue, a single reading selection, or both. But it can also be in the form of pattern sentences or direct method demonstrations. The neat separation of components in the above pattern makes for a clear organization, but the student must leaf over several pages (as many as fifteen in one German textbook) from a given explanation to the corresponding drill. We sense a widespread unawareness of the degree to which this traditional form of the lesson organization, so familiar and transparent to the teacher, is a serious source of confusion to the uninitiated learner.

A newer lesson structure favored especially in French texts could be outlined thus:

Presentation
Explanation of first point
Drill on first point
Explanation of second point
Drill on second point, etc.
Recombination readings

This pattern reflects the growing recognition of the need to bring together the explanation of individual grammar points and the corresponding drills. But if the grammar in an individual explanation component includes exceptions and peripheral points, the teacher who wisely excludes the peripheral initially will find himself selecting for assignment only those numbers in the drills that are appropriate (e.g., Exercise A, numbers one, three, five, seven, and ten).

An advertised feature in books with presentation readings and dialogues is the integrated lesson. Most of the new vocabulary and all the new points of grammar are introduced in the dialogues or readings, in which authors of German textbooks, especially, take great pride. The presentation is the point of departure in writing the lesson, for the vocabulary, structures, and contexts found here are repeated and varied in the drills--the lesson is integrated. In the abstract, the integrated lesson is a desirable goal, but in practice there are many pitfalls and difficulties of execution. For if they combine too much new grammar and vocabulary, presentation dialogues and especially presentation readings are too difficult to serve as the initial point of attack for a lesson.[3] So the instructor goes to the individual explanations and drills, only to find that the sentences there are context-bound variations of statements in the dialogue or reading, and that they do not make sense unless the presentation has been covered.[4] Too often, the integrated lesson is self-enclosed; it offers no easy point of attack.

The underlying principle of the lesson organization is continuity. This continuity takes two forms. On the one hand, there is a continuity of the lesson block, and of the recurring sequence of components within the lesson block, from the beginning of the book to the end. Secondly, the presentation dialogues and readings are characterized by continuity, both internally and

frequently also in the form of a continuous story line fiction which carried over from one lesson to the next. In both its manifestations, this continuity brings with it many serious disadvantages. In the first place, no single lesson idea with a single type of recurring presentations and exercises is equally appropriate to all the points which must be introduced in a beginning textbook. For example, a presentation through pattern sentences to be produced on cue works well with simple statements in the early lessons, but it breaks down with longer structures such as relative clauses. Nor do relative clauses lend themselves to transformation exercises, however well such transformations may work with other points of grammar. In many texts, however, transformations are used in the lesson on relative pronouns simply because this type of exercise occurs in the same component slot in earlier lessons. The beginning student will not be able to produce these long structures actively. What is the honest success realized from attempts to transform into one smooth sentence the target language equivalents of 'Mary has some books.' 'Her sister needs the books.' ('Mary has some books [which] her sister needs.') We would do better to consider recognition learning as an objective for this structure in the first year.

Within each lesson, the continuity of a single connected presentation dialogue or reading simply makes these components unnecessarily difficult. A careful search of the Romance languages or German will yield a large number of disconnected short statements that can be used at the earliest stages in teaching these languages. These statements will be authentic, will usually present minimal points of grammar in very simple terms, and will be easy for the learner to master. But as soon as the effort is made to write extended connected prose or dialogue, it becomes almost impossible to create good material at the beginning level of difficulty. So the connected reading selections in most German textbooks, especially, are riddled with footnotes, and the longer connected dialogues contain too much new and unexplained material for the student to cope with comfortably. A limited and controlled vocabulary becomes impossible, and the lexicon the authors do introduce is dictated not by being the most frequent vocabulary connected

with the new grammar, but by the requirements of the chosen episode.

A dialogue in a popular French text is a good example of how the episode dictates the lexicon. It occurs early in the first term and takes place between the young American student couple, in bed in their Rambuteau apartment, unable to sleep, discussing dreams of their soon-to-be-born child. Will he be cute, blond, healthy, intelligent? Like Mom? Like Dad? Will he perhaps be twins? The dialogue contains more than a hundred words, including the French equivalents of 'to joke,' 'to dream,' 'to earn'--plus numerous extraneous bits of popular French thrown in for authenticity. What is valuable for early learning in this dialogue is obscured by the infrequent vocabulary required by the fiction.

The continuity of a single connected presentation has a further drawback. It tends to prevent textbook authors from exploiting the full communicative potential of the new grammar they do introduce. In the treatment of the German separable prefix verbs, for example, one would ideally expect an elementary textbook to introduce the approximately twenty verbs (and corresponding utterances) most useful in getting around in the country and communicating in the classroom. The list would include: anfangen 'to begin'; aufhören 'to cease'; einladen 'to invite'; (im Wagen) abholen 'to pick up' (in the car); (Geld) ausgeben 'to spend' (money); aussehen 'to look, appear'; aufstehen 'to get up'; ablegen 'to deposit one's outer garments'; aufmachen and zumachen 'to open and close'; ausgehen 'to go out'; einschlafen 'to fall asleep'; and the verbs of travel ankommen, abfahren, einsteigen, aussteigen, umsteigen 'to arrive, depart, get on, off, or change conveyances.' The situations covered by these verbs are so varied that it would be impossible to include all or even most of them in a single presentation without extreme forcing. At best, six or seven could be worked into a dialogue on travel. One on any other subject would not do even that well. In practice, what cannot be worked into the presentation is not included in the lesson and is simply not taught. The same point could be made with the reflexive verbs in German, French, and Spanish.

In both the speaking and listening skills, the fictitious American hero almost always interacts and communicates perfectly with his native speaker friends, and at a highly sophisticated level that could not be expected of the elementary student in the classroom. It would be more realistic for the American speaker not to understand occasionally, and to use this as an occasion to introduce such useful utterances as the equivalents of 'Excuse me, I didn't understand you.', and 'Would you repeat that, please?'

The longer continuous selection bypasses the all-important get-around-in-the-language stage of proficiency, or what might be called the impersonal transaction. We mean the language exchanged in asking directions, mailing something at the post office, or ordering something to eat or drink. These short impersonal transactions are bypassed in elementary textbooks because the authors usually opt for a personalized fiction, because transactions require many different situations, and because they are not long enough to fill out what is thought to be a proper dialogue. You enter a charcuterie and say: "Deux tranches de jambon, s'il vous plaît." (Seven words, end of conversation, cut.) Next scene, in the railroad station: "Tours--un billet aller et retour, s'il vous plaît." --"Cinquante francs, monsieur." (End of conversation, cut.)[5]

A current German text contains a long dialogue between the fictitious hero and his German friend in the Munich railroad station before departing for Vienna. But alas, no one finds it necessary to stop at the ticket window. It may be thought that this criticism is anti-intellectual, but if a time machine could place Hegel himself in the Munich railroad station for the purpose of beginning a journey he would have to go to the ticket window to buy a ticket. The impersonal transaction is something no speaker of a language is excused from.

Inevitably, there is pretension built into elaborate fictions in a textbook. Fictitious dialogues or narratives are apt to fall short of their intended tone and become embarrassingly corny. Real speech situations make no pretentions as fictions and there-

fore cannot fail as such. It is impossible to be corny in saying: Deux baguettes, s'il vous plaît.

Furthermore, the fictitious continuities of our elementary textbooks are outmoded in terms of the sensibilities of today's youth. In an information-oriented age, we continue to produce trivial fictions. For a generation conditioned to discontinuity, to the televised twenty-second commercial spot with as many separate and rapidly flashing impressions--for this generation we continue to create material based on continuity. To take another example from television, continuous dialogues and readings are like the Lawrence Welk show, in which all the numbers performed are woven into a "theme" of continuity for the benefit of the geriatric audience. We should be producing teaching materials on the order of the widely imitated "Laugh-In" with its short skits and fast-cut one liners, or "Sesame Street," which teaches numbers or concepts during thirty-second mock commercials. Perhaps it is not surprising that what we do is sometimes perceived as irrelevant.

Some lessons contain too little and cause the teacher to waste time; others contain far more than can be mastered within the limited space allotted.[6] This situation occurs frequently, represented, for example, in two lessons of a popular French text. The new grammar of one lesson consists of the demonstrative pronoun celui(-ci) with its three variant forms, and the indefinites ceci/cela--nothing more. A second lesson offers an overwhelming array of the following items: the initial presentation of "regular" -dre and -ir present tense conjugations; the compound past tense of these same verbs (this tense having been introduced for the first time in the immediately preceding lesson); and the reflexive in affirmative, negative and interrogative statements in both the present tense and the new compound past! Each of these two lessons contains about two pages of exercises. The demonstrative exercises are tedious. The exercises in the other lesson had simply better be extensively supplemented to avoid disaster, and the work on that material needs at least twice the time required for the other. In most classes, these two lessons will be covered in the same amount of time. That is the result of the assumption,

invariably encouraged by textbook authors and publishers, that the lessons are of equal weight for pacing purposes.

In line with the tendency to put too much in a given lesson, there is a related tendency to simply throw in an extra construction or so because it is grammatically related to the main point. One elementary German text throws the construction Das gefällt mir. into the lesson on the dative because mir is a dative object, thus unnecessarily complicating an already difficult new concept. The parallel French plaire and Spanish gustar are equally troublesome for American speakers, and plaire is most often introduced with other verbs which are syntactically incompatible with it merely because they all "require à" as the French texts say.

But the most serious fault of the lesson format is simply this: large lesson blocks tend to force authors to conceive of individual points of grammar in broad systematic terms, variations, exceptions, irregularities, infrequent points and all. The arithmetic of this tendency is obvious. If there are two hundred small individual points of grammar which must be introduced in any elementary textbook, eight points would have to be introduced per lesson if there were twenty-five lessons with new grammar (i.e., not including review lessons). With twenty net lessons, ten minimal points would have to be introduced. Since eight or ten potentially unrelated points per lesson are obviously more than authors, teachers, or learners can juggle successfully, authors are forced to conceive of the grammar in terms of broad blocks.

Thus "one" point of grammar in a book organized into lessons might be both perfect tenses of weak verbs in German, or the entire reflexive. Or, elementary German books usually introduce all six der-words together, and in a very early lesson. They do so because dieser and jeder are so frequent, being 29th and 98th respectively in order of frequency in Pfeffer's word list. But jener, which interferes with jeder and is misused by most English-speaking students of German, is 694th in frequency in Pfeffer,[7] and a recent study has shown that it occurs almost exclusively in abstract contexts and complicated syntactical patterns beyond the active reach of the elementary student.[8] In addition, solcher and mancher are plagued by the complications solch ein (ein solcher) and manch ein.

So the exception-ridden and relatively infrequent portions of the systematic unit of grammar called der-words get in the way of the more frequent and straightforward portions.

In terms of complexity, the der-words are a small and simple block of grammar compared to other areas. The reflexive, in French as in German and Spanish, is one of the most complicated pedagogical problems teachers of those languages confront. In books organized into lessons, the reflexive tends to be thought of as a single point of grammar, and it is typically treated in one lesson (in German) or two or three connected lessons (in French). In fact, however, any careful pedagogical grammar of the reflexive would break it down into many different points. The following is a tentative outline for French:

1. The so-called "literal" reflexive, or statements that would also be reflexive in English.	Je me vois (dans un pays exotique).
2. Verbs most often used reflexively, but not reflexive in English.	Je me lève. Dépêchez-vous!
3. Verbs exclusively reflexive, but not reflexive in English.	se souvenir, s'évanouir, se moquer
4. Those "grooming" verbs which add the interference of the indirect object reflexive and the direct object noun with the definite article, where English would require a possessive adjective.	Elle s'est lavé les cheveux.
5. The reciprocal reflexive. An additional problem: The equivalent English verbs are used intransitively, but not the French. 'We meet.'	Nous nous connaissons bien. Nous nous retrouvons.
6. Verbs whose meanings change from the transitive to the reflexive, some subtly, some radically.	Je me sers de . . . . Il s'agit de (ses activités).
7. To express what would be passive in English. Especially frequent in Spanish.	Cela ne se fait pas. Aquí se habla espagnol. Allí se vende cerveza.

8. To indicate a change of condition. The equivalent of English "get" plus adjective. — Je me fatigue.

With the exception of point eight, the above outline is valid, on the whole, for German. In addition, the German indirect object reflexive has a greater range and separate dative forms in the first person and the second person familiar. A further complication in German is the reflexive plus prepositional phrase complement: Ich freue mich., but Ich freue mich auf Ihren Besuch., and Ich freue mich darauf. Without contrastive reference to English, a comprehensive computerized analysis of the German reflexive divides it into ten categories, which, given the extreme complexity of the phenomenon, the author concedes to be problematical in many cases.[9]

The divisions outlined above refer only to the various meanings of the reflexive. At the same time, the learner must cope with formidable additional problems of structure and word order. These include the agreement of subject and reflexive pronoun when they are widely separated in the sentence; the use, in French, of être as the auxiliary; and the position of the reflexive pronoun in the affirmative, negative, and interrogative in simple and compound tenses. Then there is the imperative and the infinitive in context and, in German, the separation of the reflexive pronoun from the verb it belongs to when a form of the latter is in the final position (Er hatte sich schon seit Wochen auf seinen Urlaub in Europa gefreut.). When all these aspects and dimensions of the reflexive are treated together in the lesson format, the careful separation necessary to ease the way for the student becomes almost impossible. One direct method French text, with explanations completely in French, randomly intermixes all the French reflexive verbs mentioned above plus others for a total of sixty in a rambling, disconnected presentation that defies credibility. Finally, so much of the reflexive in other European languages is so highly contrastive to English that concentrated treatment of it in traditional lesson blocks violates, almost of necessity, a valid criterion that has been advanced in the literature on

textbook evaluation--that the "learning burden" be evenly distributed from one unit to the next.[10]

We have shown, then, that the lesson format seriously distorts and complicates the presentation of the elementary grammar of a foreign language. By contrast, the justifications for traditional lessons are relatively insignificant, and seem mainly to be the result of long usage, the traditions of Latin grammar, and the commercial considerations of publishers. A book so organized does lend itself to a rapid overview by those examining a text for adoption, and the prospective teacher is assured that instruction will proceed in a series of recurring and predictable cycles. The lesson format seems to be enforced primarily by the publishers' perception of teacher acceptability which, in turn, is based on a concern for finishing the grammar in the course of the first year. But given the uneven density of lessons in most textbooks, even this advantage is dearly bought by a rushed and inadequate treatment of some points and excessive class time spent on others. Even in the area of pacing, therefore, the supposed strengths of the lesson format are illusory.

Instead of organizing individual points of grammar into large blocks and thereby fragmenting our pedagogical attention, why can't we separate these points, place each in its own distinct subdivision, and give it the detailed and undivided attention it requires. Instead of thinking in terms of lessons, why can't we conceive of the material to be taught as a continuum composed of minimal increment units.

A minimal increment unit could be defined as an individual point of grammatical structure to the exclusion of most irregularities or other complications, or a unit of optimum size for easy student assimilation. An example in German would be the perfect tense of weak verbs with <u>haben</u>: <u>Ich habe es gesagt</u>. Such a unit is not as minimal as it may seem, for the German perfect contrasts with the preterite, which would be used in English, and the student must learn the formation of the past participle and cope with its final position in the clause. Examples in French would be the use of <u>on</u> as subject, the <u>il y a</u> / <u>voilà</u> contrast, and the <u>il faut</u> construction (this last firmly

planted well before the introduction of subjunctive complications).

In the initial increments, the authors could select what is easy, frequent, or has high communication value. This would give the students self confidence and help reduce the beginning-of-term dropout rate and the panic reaction in which many students start to learn the course instead of the language. If the words and structures introduced actually help the students use the language either in the country or the classroom, they should be better motivated to learn. At this early stage, there would be a concentration on grammar that can be lexicalized, on short, straightforward sentences, commands, and questions. In this way, learners would build up a sizeable fund of expressions and vocabulary before more difficult structures are introduced. As they progress into the language, the authors should ask themselves: "What can we say with what we know so far?" In choosing what to introduce in the next increment, shey should ask: "What can we introduce that will extend the student's communicative range the most?

Most of the advantages of the increment unit organization can be stated in terms of sequencing. In the lesson format, flexibility in sequencing is limited by the relatively small number of lessons and still further by the fact that the first three or four will be devoted to the very basic and the last three or four to advanced reading grammar. But as the number of subdivisions in a textbook is increased, the number of theoretically possible juxtapositions rises exponentially and becomes unlimited for practical purposes after one hundred or so units are reached. Even though a large number of sequences must be eliminated because some points of grammar must be introduced before others, the remaining possibilities would still offer a vast range for experimentation. In any organization with more and smaller units, the art of sequencing could therefore be brought to a level of refinement unknown today. One could sequence for imparting self confidence in the early stages of the course, for an easy rate of assimilation, and for minimizing student frustration and therefore the probable dropout rate. One could sequence for reinforcement of what has just been learned,

for firmly implanting the basic feature of a structure before attacking the exceptions, and for student motivation through maximizing oral communication facility as early as possible in the course. Finally, one could sequence for minimizing interference between English and the target language and between items within the target language. This list is by no means complete.

We do not conceive of the increment units as being of the same length or having the same internal structure. Each increment would, rather, be precisely as long or as short as required for the treatment and optimum exploitation of the point at hand. Also, the mode of presentation and types of exercises would not be dictated by a recurring pattern, but by the most appropriate treatment of the individual structure. Isolated constructions would not, as in the lesson format, be thrown in for inadequate treatment with the material bearing the closest grammatical similarity. Instead, they would be made the subject of their own distinct increments. Examples would be gefallen in German, gustar in Spanish, and the depuis time phrase in French: Nous sommes à Bordeaux depuis quatre jours.

Since the number of increments would approximate or exceed the number of class periods in an academic year, tests could be scheduled with equal convenience on any day of the term. They would not, as in the lesson organization, be convenient only at breaks between lessons, and teachers would be relieved of the necessity of rushing to finish lessons in order to assign quizzes on scheduled or convenient days.

An elementary textbook divided into flexible increments offers many intriguing possibilities for easing the way over grammatical difficulties, from the moderately complicated to the most formidable. The French negatives are a good example of a moderately complicated block, and one which is rarely given systematic treatment in textbooks or made the subject of a major component in a lesson. In four or five very small separate units, the variations of this important structure could be taught both more easily and more thoroughly: (1)the basic ne . . . pas, ne . . . jamais, ne . . . plus, structurally consistent, early in the course; (2)in a later unit, ne . . . rien and ne . . . personne, of which the final element functions as a noun and can serve as subject or

object; (3)the structure and word order of the above, including negatives, in the compound past after that tense is introduced; (4)the semantically confusing ne . . . que, which follows the negative pattern, but should be contrasted in drills with a true negative to show clearly its non-negative meaning; (5)finally, a unit sequenced very late might introduce additional negatives of lesser frequency (guère, aucun, nul, nulle part), though these could well be left for inclusion in the intermediate course.

But the most attractive possibilities of the increment organization are in easing the way over large and formidable blocks of grammar such as the French reflexive. Its introduction could be through a situational presentation--things everybody does every day. In the following example, there is one use of the "literal" reflexive to illustrate the structure and function of the pronoun, six verbs which are most often reflexive, and three non-reflexives for contrast:

Je me réveille.
Je me lève.
Je me regarde dans la glace.
Je me lave.
Je me rase.
Je m'habille.
(Je vais aux classes.
(Je rentre à la maison.
(Je dîne avec la famille.
Je me couche de bonne heure.

With this limited presentation as an introduction, the structural present tense pattern of the reflexive could be thoroughly learned with minimal distraction from new vocabulary. Drills could offer practice with a variety of personal subjects, could contrast reflexive and non-reflexive structures, and include the simple tense negative as well. In subsequent increments, new aspects of the reflexive could be presented, one or two at a time, each unit at the same time both explicitly and subtly reviewing and reinforcing uses and structures from preceding units. The progression would be carefully planned from what is simpler, more practical, or more frequent to the exceptional and more complicated. Such a spiraling learning process should result in better and easier assimilation of the material by the student.[11]

As with anything new, we foresee a few possible difficulties with an increment unit organization. Courses would have to be planned more carefully and with greater attention to pacing. The table of contents would probably be cluttered, and a book organized into increments would not lend itself to the quick overview so popular with teachers examining a text for adoption. Also, it may not be possible to cover the entire grammar quite as rapidly using increment units as it would using lessons. We do feel, however, that the difference would not be a great as some might expect. Any serious problems could be remedied by the expedient, desirable in any case, of greater integration of the elementary and intermediate courses, or at least of producing an integrated elementary and review grammar between one set of covers. The perceived necessity of "choosing a book we can finish in a year" has long been a major impediment to needed innovation at the elementary level. The increment unit format would have so many offsetting advantages that it should definitely be tried. Recently, the profession has witnessed a good deal of discussion of mini-units, microteaching, and spiraling. It is high time that these insights were applied as a matter of course to the writing of elementary textbooks.

Obviously, the increment unit organization outlined here is not the only possible alternative to the traditional lesson format. Once the rigid lesson block is abandoned, authors experimenting with new organizations will undoubtedly come up with new modes and variants. As a more cautious first step, for example, minimal increments could be limited to providing an easy introduction in the early part of the course. Or a text could start with very small increments which grow longer as the course progresses, approaching lesson length as more review is incorporated toward the end of the book. But any alternative would involve breaking up the long unwieldy lesson blocks into smaller and more assimilable units on the one hand, and, on the other, giving each point to be learned a treatment that is individually appropriate rather than one dictated by a recurring pattern of organization.

We sense that discontent with many aspects of the lesson organization is widespread in the profession today. Books which do retain lesson blocks are increasingly revising them to eliminate the separation of explanations and drills. Textbook advertisements boast that not more than three separate points of grammar are presented in each lesson, or that the various points are first drilled separately before being combined in "mixed drills."

Also, rigid adherence to the lesson format has been abandoned in several textbooks now on the market. In 1966, Politzer Hagiware, and Carduner published the revised edition of an elementary French text entitled L'Échelle, which is not organized into lessons but into 224 "learning steps," each devoted to a minimal point of grammar. The authors argue in the Preface that "in language instruction, the individual problem forms the linguistic as well as the psychological unit of learning," and they are implicitly critical of an organization "according to lessons that contain several grammatical points with rules, exceptions, and exceptions to exceptions merely because they belong logically or grammatically (though perhaps not pedagogically) under the same heading."[12] For various extraneous reasons, however, this text has not been widely imitated or adopted. At least there have been no new editions since 1966.

Albert Valdman's innovative new elementary text Langue et Culture (1975)[13] contains a total of fifty-two teaching units divided into three parts. The First Part's twenty-five lessons--termed Leçons in contrast to the longer Unités of Parts Two and Three--are in essence the kind of increments we have in mind: short units presenting useful language for communication and the easy portions of the basic grammar. The Communicating in Spanish program of Lamadrid, Bull, and Briscoe (1974) is the most radical of any beginning language material or method that we have seen. Totally programmed from beginning to end, it leads the student through the language in 110 "Assignments," organizing, in the words of the authors, "the learning sequence in greater detail than any existing textbook."[14] As of early 1976,

both these texts are so new that it is not yet possible to make an accurate assessment of their success.[15]

But these new departures should become the rule rather than the exceptions. With the language requirement gone in many colleges and universities, and with SAT scores of verbal ability on a downward slide for well over a decade, the foreign language profession can no longer afford the avoidable difficulties and student frustrations that have all too frequently been a direct consequence of the lesson organization. With new formats built around small increments, the language could be approached from the point of least resistance, and the college student with limited verbal aptitude and no previous foreign language exposure would be less likely to be lost to languages than he is at present. To facilitate this desirable goal, new elementary textbooks with radically new, easier, and more flexible organizations are urgently needed.

N O T E S

[1]Textbooks will not be named in contexts which are implicitly or explicitly critical.

[2]In the elementary text German: A Structural Approach, by Walter F. W. Lohnes and F. W. Strothmann (2nd ed., New York: Norton, 1973), there are 207 numbered sections of grammatical explanation termed "Analysis." Basic Conversational French by Julian Harris and André Lévêque (5th ed., New York: Hold, Rinehart & Winston, 1975) contains 117 numbered sections. If subsections are counted as covering individual points, the total in Harris and Lévêque comes to approximately 240.

[3]In their book The Foreign Language Learner: A Guide for Teachers (New York: Regents, 1973, p. 88), Mary Finocchiaro and Michael Bonomo recommend that "new vocabulary items should always be introduced in known structures." Long, unaided presentation readings containing both the new vocabulary and the new grammar seriously violate this sound principle.

[4]In his study comparing dialogues in elementary German textbooks with those in actual spoken German, Gerhard Clausing recommends that "those dialogue utterances that are converted to drill items must be short and relatively context-free" ("Replicated Spoken German in Beginning Textbooks--an Appraisal and Proposal," Unterrichtspraxis, 6, No. 1 [1974], 75).

[5]Over the decades, the failure to teach those portions of a language necessary to get along where it is spoken has helped give the American foreign language profession a bad reputation with its clientele. The complaint is familiar: "I had two years of French in college, but it didn't help me when I was in France."

[6]Cf. Günter G. Pfister and John M. Troyanovich, "The Elementary College German Text 1958-68," Unterrichtspraxis, 4, No. 1 (1971), 92-100. Of the thirty-five texts analyzed, only two were considered adequate in the area of even lesson density (pp. 93-94).

[7]J. Alan Pfeffer, Grunddeutsch: Basic (Spoken) German Word List, Grundstufe (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 58, 59, 68 resp.

[8]Edwin A. Hopkins and Randall L. Jones, "Jener in Modern Standard German," Unterrichtspraxis, 5, No. 1 (1972), 15-27.

[9]Erich Mater, Deutsche Verben (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1969), VII, 7-11.

[10]Günter G. Pfister and Hertha A. Rada, "The Dilemma of Textbook Selection: An Objective Evaluation as an Alternative to Book Reviews," Unterrichtspraxis, 7, No. 2 (1974), 147. See also Pfister and Troyanovich, pp. 93 and 96.

[11]For the concept of the "spiral approach," see Finocchiaro and Bonomo, p. 85.

[12]Robert L. Politzer, Michio P. Hagiwara, and Jean R. Carduner, L'Echelle: Structures essentielles du français (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell, 1966), p. ix.

[13]A Basic Course in French (New York: Macmillan).

[14]Enrique E. Lamadrid, William E. Bull, and Laurel A. Briscoe, Communicating in Spanish, Level One (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1974), Instructor's Manual, p. v.

[15]1975-76 was barely the first possible year of adoption for the Valdman text, and barely the second for Communicating in Spanish.